

Weare Open Space Committee
Minutes
September 27, 2005
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In attendance were: Steve Najjar, John Ciampi, Mike Boyko, Peter Spragg, George Malette, Pat Myers, and Andrea Alderman.

The chair called the meeting to order at 7PM.

Last Month's Minutes – The minutes of August 23, 2005, were reviewed by Committee members. No changes were noted. Mike made motion to approve the minutes as recorded, and Andrea 2nd. All voted in the affirmative, and the motion carries.

Bolton Closeout – Steve stated the Committee should use this land acquisition attempt to determine what went right/wrong. Steve felt there were issues involved here that were out of the Committee's influence. There is some question actually how serious was Frank's intent concerning placing his land under a conservation umbrella. Mike asked the Chair to review the final offer of the WOSC to Mr. Bolton, to which Steve replied that a final offer was extended to Mr. Bolton in which the Weare Conservation Commission voted its approval (\$250K); the WOSC offered to purchase Frank's back parcel, and place a conservation easement on his 17 acre front parcel. Pat felt Frank came to the OSC with an offer before he fully understood what his actual plans for his property were, and that he hadn't adequately explored all his options before meeting with the Committee. Mike underscored Pat's discernment by remarking that Frank often vacillated on his objectives, and Andrea added that Frank had a subdivision plan drawn up while the conservation plans were being discussed. Steve mentioned he recalled a LLA came through the Weare Conservation Commission on Mr. Bolton's property which furthered to strengthen Pat's hypothesis. Andrea suggested that in future land considerations, both parties should allow sufficient interlude in order to dwell on their offers. She feels a year is a fair general benchmark before moving to the next higher level. Pat stated that there could be a situation in which a party wants to leave open a noncommittal channel of communication before making a serious offer, and that could take several years.

Oliphant Update – Steve felt the clock started ticking on this land offer once the site walk occurred. Mike stated that Mr. Oliphant seems intent on securing other designs for his property, most likely a subdivision. Peter suggested Mr. Oliphant is playing the Market bubble to possibly realize a 15% return on his investment. Steve stated he is not convinced that the housing bubble theory adequately explains the current high market values because the forces involved are very complex. Steve suggested that being on the edge of aggressive sprawl is a more powerful factor. Pat commented that this issue is beyond the scope and control of this Committee and wants to refrain from spending more time discussing a moot issue. Steve wondered if conservation property should compete equally with other uses of town property, such as schools, municipal buildings, and other town uses. Pat commented she backs the notion that the WOSC might consider educating the public on the value of conservation land, with the intention of persuading voters to be comfortable expending full market value for conservation property. George encouraged the members of the Committee to become familiar with the reference booklet Conserving Your Land by *Brenda Lind*, and also to read any brochures that become available, in order to establish a personal knowledgeable baseline. George continued, if the landowner shows deeper interest, continue onto phase two, which is to give the landowner the booklet Conserving Your Land. Steve

feels that George's suggestion isn't necessary – simply hand him/her the booklet at the onset. For economy and efficiency, Andrea recommended distributing the brochures en mass, then following up with the booklet. Other suggestions made this evening concerning land acquisition: Pat recommends a phone call as a follow up to contact letters; Steve mentioned that the Committee needs to setup a GIS data base, and also to have more newspaper coverage. Mike distributed several copies of the Oliphant property proposal, which discloses the value of Mr. Oliphant's property if it were a subdivision. This proposal, however, does not make adjustments for unpaved Tiffany Hill Rd. The WOSC believes that Tom does not understand that he will be required to pay for the road paving from his proposed site to Thorndike Rd. Steve estimates the cost to him would be \$500K to \$600K, not including the cost of paving his proposed subdivision. The prospect of paving will upgrade Tiffany Hill Rd. to a class 5 road, with an estimated cost of \$200.00 per linear foot. Steve also pointed out that if Mr. Oliphant were to sell his property at a speculative \$450K, his tax obligation will be burdensome. George pointed out that the OSC should wait out this land deal as long as possible, because after figuring in the added cost of the road upgrade, and the negative impact it will have on Tom's investment, Mr. Oliphant may choose to consider his land protection option. John suggested making him an offer, but Mike repelled that statement, stating since there is no appraisal, we cannot move forward with an offer. Mike already spoke with an appraiser, Ross Phelps, of Armstrong Consulting. The lowest level of appraisal would be to look Mr. Oliphant's estimate to determine its validity, review the regulations and zoning rules, and make a comparison to other similar properties. The next higher level of appraisal would include the above factors, plus determine the value of the property with a limited appraisal of the land's value. There is some possibility that Mr. Henry Tiffany, a neighbor, may purchase the land after the conservation value is deducted from the total price of the property. Pat suggested keeping Mr. Tiffany informed of the progression of circumstances so that he would not lose interest in this matter. A previous motion was tabled and carried to expend up to \$1K to secure an appraisal on this property.

Chipmunk Falls – Steve made contact with Mr. Clements, a property owner located tax map 401/91, who declined interest in conservation protection, and Steve also tried to contact property owner Borden, tax lot 401/96, who did not answer the phone call. Pat proposed that an initial phone contact may be too abrupt, so a letter may be the preferred first connection. Steve suggested mailing out prepared letters at the next meeting.

Frank Ferrante – Owns the largest undeveloped contiguous block of local property, approximately 600 acres. In order to test the waters, Steve suggested contacting Mr. Ferrente to determine what offer can be extended to him. It is worth noting that this property abuts protected property in Hopkington. This parcel is currently on the market for 2.5 million, and has the potential for 110 house lots. Mr. Ferrente previously stated that he is willing to maintain dialogue with the WOSC if it were financially propitious to him. Frank could enjoy a tax advantage if he procured a bargain sale with the Town. Steve speculated the land definitely has conservation appeal based on the magnitude of the parcel. The next step is to meet with him in order to determine if he is willing to move forward with a conservation proposal. This is an important next step because an appraisal wouldn't be cheap. Steve recommended establishing light rapport with Mr. Ferrente, introducing him to the Conserving Your Land booklet, and keeping communication channels open. Steve: "If deal goes through, we'll need to float a bond, and we can also look at the timber value." Steve raised the concept that the cost of supporting 110 new dwellings will continue in perpetuity; however, a bond could be paid in full within 15-20 years. Mike raised the recollection that, based on the public opinion of the original public assembly at John Stark High School, the public favored less population density, and therefore we cannot afford *not* to pursue sub development relief on this 600 acre parcel. Steve indicated that the *Fish and Game* GIS analysis of conservation value is on the high side of scale. Steve and possibly

Mike will seek to establish a baseline rapport with Mr. Ferrente, give him a copy of the conservation booklet, and keep the communication corridor open.

Warrant Article For Funding Conservation Land – Steve feels the important thing here is making a good sell to the taxpayers. Also, there is a need for research to determine the cost on community services resulting from development, verses the revenue to the Town from timber harvests if the land is under conservation. This information will be helpful to favor town support toward land conservation.

Walking Town Owned Properties – For the purpose of documentation and possible future conversion into conservation land, Steve is asking the Committee if anyone is interested in site walking the larger town owned parcels. The members examined maps and held discussion pertaining to this objective without settling on any conclusion. Steve proposed that all town owned parcels be under a conservation easement, to which Pat countered that proposition would be a hard sell to the taxpayers. Steve replied the important issue here is it would formalize property protection, and would have zero impact upon taxpayers. Mike added it would ensure the land couldn't be used for some other municipal purpose. Consensus prevailed to bring this issue before the Conservation Commission.

Planning Board Issues – The recently organized *Cluster Subdivision Regulation Committee* is looking for a volunteer from the OSC. Pat volunteered for the position, George is a member at large, and Tom will represent the Conservation Commission.

Weare Library Letter – The members read a letter from library director Christine Hague, thanking the WOSC for providing the Library with a copy of Conserving Your Land, which will be cataloged and made available for loan.

Adjournment – The meeting adjourned at 9:20 P.M.

Recorded As a True Record,

John Ciampi
Recording Secretary

cc: Town Clerk
Tina Pelletier
BOS
OSC files